

FEEDING THE CHILDREN—MIND, BODY AND SPIRIT



CAROL DIXON

AGENCY

Kentucky Education and Workforce Development Cabinet.

HOMETOWN

Louisville

EDUCATION

Bachelor's in foods & nutrition from University of Louisville ; Level 3 Certification as a dietary manager

HOBBIES


Singing, traveling, exercise

THE RIGHT INGREDIENTS TO THE PERFECT CAREER

At last count Carol Dixon had well over 150 children last year, all of whom are students participating in the numerous programs at the Kentucky School for the Blind (KSB), and all of whom she calls her own. After 16 years at the facility, the food service director says the small community has become like family. "There's a commonality among our group. We all come together – parents, teachers, aids, charitable foundations, administrators and those in the community – it really is a family atmosphere. We work by the motto, 'many hands make work light.'"

And the proof is in the pudding. The school not only provides instruction, housing and services for grades K-12, but is also known nationwide as one of leading educational resource centers on blindness. The school's extra-curricular teams are quite successful as well, most notably the wrestling team. KSB, located in Louisville, is home to the oldest Boy Scout troop in the area, and offers an extensive music program.

Kenneth Washington, director of operations at the school, said, "Through various programs, KSB provides services to blind and visually impaired students across the entire state. Whether a student is a recipient of one of our many assistive technology devices, lives on campus, or participates in any of our programs, it's KSB's desire



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to make a difference in the life of each student we touch, and assist parents and guardians in any way we can.”

The school operates on a typical calendar, yet they are rarely out for snow days since most of the students are already living on campus. “If one person can make it here, we’re open,” Dixon said. Summer camp is also offered throughout the summer. “[Musician] Patrick Henry Hughes was a summer student here.”

Simply put, Dixon is responsible for feeding the children. But the ingredients for the job are much more complicated. She plans the menus, orders the food, submits reimbursement claims and maintains the records of the food services operations. Mix in state and federal food regulations, add school nutrition guidelines, and blend with child nutrient standards and you have a challenging recipe.

“It’s an interesting time to be involved in food services,” Dixon says. “There’s so much emphasis today on school nutrition and childhood obesity. We’re finding ways to teach our kids good nutrition habits while still satisfying them, like allowing second helpings of fruits and vegetables but not entrees, serving 1 percent milk, and offering drinks with less sugar.”

She, too, has learned the value of good nutrition and healthy living. She’s lost more than 100 pounds since 2006, and has kept it off through diet and exercise.

Dixon oversees a staff of four, who are sanitation certified by Louisville Metro Guidelines. Together, they prepare three meals per day for the students since 60 percent of the students live at the school during the week in the residential program. They also provide groceries for students who participate in the KSB Independent Living Program, which teaches food preparation in the dorm, along with instructing the students on how to live independently when they leave the school. Many of the students have special diets, which add another challenge for staff.

Implementing government-funded programs and administering the many state and federal regulations required can also be challenging. “But I try to encourage people to realize that the majority of the regulations are actually good for the health and well-being of our children,” Dixon said.

Washington praised Dixon’s extensive contributions to the school and students. “She’s not only an asset to the Food Service Department, but she plays a very instrumental role in the daily operations of KSB. Carol takes such pride in promoting the nutritional health standards for our students, and she is always encouraging healthy eating.”

Dixon came to the position after a high school friend, who was a music teacher at the school, recommended she apply. She had previously worked for the Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children, at that time located in Middletown. “I think this job chose me, not vice versa,” she says. “I enjoy working in the school system. When you get that hug from the students, and when you see so many students returning to work here themselves, you know it’s a success. I love these kids! They’re so much fun!”

